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NEW C.I.A. ESTIMATE FINDS SOVIET SEEKS SUPERIORITY IN ARMS

INTELLIGENCE EVALUATION 'GRIM'

Somber Assessment Is Attributed To Outside Advisers Brought Into Study For First Time

By DAVID BINDER
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 25—President-elect Carter will receive an intelligence estimate of long-range Soviet strategic intentions next month that raises the question whether the Russians are shifting their objectives from rough parity with United States military forces to superiority.

In reporting this, high-ranking officials of the Central Intelligence Agency said their annual so-called national estimate of Soviet strategic objectives over the next 10 years, just completed, was more somber than any in more than a decade. A top-level military intelligence officer who has seen the estimate commented: "It was more than somber—it was very grim. It flatly states the judgment that the Soviet Union is seeking superiority over United States forces. The flat judgment that that is the aim of the Soviet Union is a majority view in the estimate. The questions begin on when they will achieve it."

Previous national estimates of Soviet aims—the supreme products of the intelligence community since 1950—had concluded that the objective was rough parity with United States strategic capabilities.

Bush: 'Worrisome Signs'

"There are some worrisome signs," George Bush, Director of Central Intelligence, said in an interview in characterizing the latest estimate, "and the viewpoints, interpretations and comments on these will be adequately reflected in the estimate."

He said the shift in assessment developed from evidence gathered in the past year and from new interpretations of older evidence that had resulted from "a competitive analysis" in which, for the first time, a team of outsiders analyzed and challenged estimates prepared by the regular intelligence community. As a result some of the governmental analysts changed their assessments.

While Mr. Bush declined to discuss the substance of the estimate, it can be authoritatively reported that the worrisome signs included newly developed guided missiles, a vast program of underground shelters and a continuing buildup of air defenses.

He acknowledged that the 1976 estimate had been prepared amid controversy in the intelligence community, partly induced by the deliberate introduction of the team of outsiders, who were supplied with the same raw material as the estimate team headed by Howard Stoertz, the Central Intelligence Agency's national intelligence officer-on-the-Soviet-Union.

Upholding Right of Dissent

Mr. Bush, who said the final estimate contained "a full expostulation of the views of the principals," asserted that he had promised to uphold the right of dissent at the outset of his tenure 11 months ago. "I feel I have made good on that," he added.

There have always been officials in the intelligence community who took a grim view of Soviet strategic objectives, but until this year, according to insiders, they constituted a small minority. In the interview Mr. Bush spoke of changed perceptions. Another high-ranking C.I.A. official who participated in the latest estimate asserted that pessimistic assessments were being heard even from analysts who have taken a rosier attitude toward Soviet goals.

"The consensus is breaking up," the source continued. "Maybe it will be a different consensus next year. A great many analysts are disturbed increasingly by what they see on the Soviet side—more and more Soviet weapons programs. The Soviets are developing across the board. That is bothering people. ICBM's everywhere you look, a continual steady program."

Guidance for American Policy

The long-range estimate provides guidance for the size and shape of the United States defense budget, the Government's policy approach to East-West relations, including strategic arms negotiations, civil-defense planning and, ultimately, the entire concept of strategic deterrence, based for two decades on nuclear-tipped intercontinental missiles and antimissile defenses. The estimate also influences the annual "secret posture statement" sent to Congress by the Secretary of Defense as guidance for the protection of the United States.

Months of research, collation of photoreconnaissance, monitoring of signals, clandestine agents' reports and studies of Soviet documents underlie the estimate. It is summarized, dissented against and reviewed at ever-higher levels and is finally argued out before the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, comprising the heads of the intelligence agencies and intelligence-oriented departments.

The more somber view represented—"more somber" being the phraseology of the C.I.A.—developed in an unusual fashion, according to a number of participants. They said it came about primarily through continuing dissents by a long-term maverick in the intelligence community, Maj. Gen. George J. Keegan Jr., whose voice was strengthened this year by like-minded outsiders. General Keegan, who is retiring Jan. 1 as Air Force chief of intelligence, describes himself as "the eye of controversy" in the intelligence community and has been contesting the estimates of Soviet intentions for 22 years.

Offensive Warfare Expected

On the basis of photoreconnaissance of construction of underground shelters for protection against nuclear attack and of naval construction and of evidence of new missile systems, General Keegan became convinced that the Soviet Union was preparing for offensive war against the United States. This prompted him to oppose a 1972 treaty with the Russians restricting antiballistic-missile programs and another 1972 treaty curbing offensive nuclear weapons.

In 1974 his dissents to the national estimate relating to the significance of the Soviet civil-defense program and new guided missiles provoked such a storm that he was called to the White House to make his case before the advisory board. Out of those dissents and others a belief grew among members of the board that the annual estimates of Soviet capacilities and aims might be too soft.

Normally the President is screened from debates on intelligence estimates, which often develop into impassioned and even furious exchanges. The dissents of General Keegan and like-minded officials raised doubts about such critical questions as the level of Soviet defense spending, so that the 16-member Presidential board began suggesting several years ago that the estimate of Soviet intentions include the views of outsiders. This year President Ford accepted the proposal by the board, which is empowered to review and evaluate foreign intelligence.

Last June Mr. Bush and William G. Hyland, Mr. Ford's deputy assistant for national security, selected a panel of seven outsiders to join, experimentally, in drafting the next long-range estimate. The conditions were that the outsiders be mutually agreeable to the advisory board and to Mr. Bush and that they hold more pessimistic views of Soviet plans than those entertained by the advocates of the rough parity thesis.

Those selected were Richard Pipes, Professor of Russian History at Harvard; Thomas W. Wolfe of the RAND Corporation; Lieut. Gen. Daniel O. Graham, ret., former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency; Paul D. Wolfowitz of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; Paul H. Nitze, former Deputy Secretary of Defense; John Vogt, a retired Air Force general, and Prof. William Van Cleve of the University of Southern California, formerly a delegate to the strategic arms talks.

The two groups, which began work late in August, were assigned three topics: the accuracy of Soviet guided missiles,

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the penetrability of Soviet air defense by low-level bombers, and overall Soviet strategic capabilities and objectives. There was a debate on whether to do estimates on Soviet capabilities in anti-submarine warfare, but the issue was dropped because of violent opposition by the Navy on security grounds.

As related by participants in both the team headed by Professor Pipes and the team headed by Mr. Stoertz, controversy boiled up immediately, not only on interpretation of less easily defined strategic objectives but also with regard to missile accuracy.

'We Left Them Speechless'

"Sometimes we left them speechless," one of the outsiders remarked. "We had men of great prestige, some of them with memories going back 25 years or more, and they made devastating critiques of the agency estimates." A C.I.A. estimator described the work as "a rather unfair setup" in which the outsiders felt they had a somewhat broader mandate, and used it.

Another intelligence officer spoke of "absolutely bloody discussions" during which the outsiders accused the C.I.A. of dealing in faulty assumptions, faulty analysis, faulty use of intelligence and faulty exploitation of available intelligence. "It was an absolute disaster for the C.I.A.," this official added in an authorized interview. Acknowledging that there were more points of difference than in most years, he said: "There was disagreement beyond the facts."

As related by members of both teams, there was a standoff on Soviet missile accuracy—an old argument, as one observed, which deals with the highly sensitive subject of the vulnerability of United States Minuteman ICBM's housed in silos. The outsiders estimated that Soviet missiles may have attained accuracy to within a fifteenth of a nautical mile, about that of American missiles. The insiders, arguing that there was no hard evidence, maintained that Soviet missiles were less accurate—probably closer to a quarter of a mile.

On Soviet low-level air defenses each team influenced the other, a C.I.A. participant related. One of the outsiders confirmed this, saying there was general agreement that the Russians could not yet neutralize American nuclear bombers coming in at low level although they were investing a great deal in air defenses. The matter has direct bearing on the decision whether the United States should build the B-1 bomber, the analysts said.

Dispute on Strategic Objectives

All those interviewed acknowledged that the greatest disputes arose over Soviet strategic aims.

The outsiders asserted that the ultimate intention was to develop forces capable of interfering with the free flow of ocean transport, denying raw materials to the West, disrupting fuel supplies, defeating the "projection of power from sea to land" by Western forces, defending nuclear capability from American nuclear submarines and developing strategic forces that would ultimately have a superior first-strike capability.

The insiders retorted that hard evidence did not permit such extrapolations, according to a C.I.A. participant. He said with regard to Soviet military preparations: "For us the question is not whether the Russians are coming, but whether it is feasible for them to get here and how soon. That comes back to the question of United States will and determination. If we don't have it, then there is superiority."

After a series of clashes the teams convened Dec. 2 and 3 before the President's advisory board and presented their estimates and critiques. In the judgment of outsiders, the C.I.A. estimate, which formed the basis for the national estimate, was strongly influenced by their group. General Keegan was said to believe the insiders shifted 180 degrees as a result of the exchange.

Paper Redrafted Three Times

As a result of the disagreements and a substantial number of dissents filed by General Keegan, the national estimate was redrafted three times before reaching its final form. Professor Pipes and General Keegan were described as quite pleased with the outcome.

There is a prospect that the Carter Administration might look further into the somber side of the estimates because Zbigniew Brzezinski, the President-elect's designated national security adviser, recently received a briefing on Soviet military programs from General Keegan.

The Pipes team is expected to submit a separate proposal to the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board late this month recommending that the estimates procedure be revised and that outsiders be brought into the process.

Mr. Bush was said to feel that the exercise had been useful, although he regretted publicity about it.

MEMO

TO: The Record

DATE: 22 December 1

FROM: Richard Pipes

LOCATION:

SUBJECT: Conversation with Mr. David Binder of the New York Times

CC: D.M. Finnigan
S.E. David

On the evening of December 20 I received a telephone call from Mr. David Binder of the New York Times who wanted to know if I could "talk" about Project B. I told him I could not, whereupon he informed me that he had received a briefing by the Agency on this work. I told him that in view of this fact I would find out the following day whether I could or could not talk with him.

The following day, December 21, during a meeting between Team B and NFIB I discussed this conversation with Mr. ~~Tohal~~ Lehman who told me that he had indeed talked to Mr. Binder and given some general information on the Project "to set the record straight." He said he had no objection to my talking with Mr. Binder in similar terms. Later that afternoon I met Mr. Binder at the airport prior to my departure for Boston and chatted with him about Team B. I avoided any mention of its findings or conclusions and restricted my comments to general background information. I was particularly keen on conveying to him that the Project was not intended to assail the CIA but should be viewed as a form of self-criticism initiated by the DCI and intended to improve the process of national estimates.

cc: [redacted]

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